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(71) Applicant(s)
Ainsworth Game Technology Limited

(72) Inventor(s)
Meyer, Jason

(74) Agent / Attorney
Baldwin Shelston Waters, Level 21 60 Margaret Street, Sydney, NSW, 2000

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COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

FOR A STANDARD PATENT

ORIGINAL

Name of Applicant/s: Ainsworth Game Technology Limited

Actual Inventor/s: Jason Meyer

Address for Service: Baldwin Shelston Waters
60 MARGARET STREET
SYDNEY NSW 2000

CCN: 3710000352

Invention Title: GAMING MACHINE

Details of Associated Provisional Application No. 2002950753 dated 14 Aug 2002

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to me/us:-

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GAMING MACHINE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to gaming machines. The invention has been developed primarily for computerised gaming machines such as stand-alone "poker machines" or internet-facilitated gaming. In light of the prevalence of these forms of gaming, the invention will be described herein, with reference to these applications. However, this is purely illustrative and in no way restrictive on the application of the invention to other areas.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Gaming machines have long been known and are now one of the most common forms of gambling. Usually, gaming machines will simulate a well-known game of chance. One of the oldest and best known forms of gaming machine is the rotating reel-type "poker machine". Poker machines use a series of three, four or five reels, each reel having symbols on its peripheral edge. The reels are rotated upon the placement of a bet and then stopped to produce an array of randomly selected symbols. Winnings are paid if the random selection of symbols matches one or more of the predetermined winning combinations.

Gaming machines can "pay winnings" in a variety of ways. These include dispensing money, dispensing tokens that can be redeemed for money, or simply adding credits to a credit meter that can be used for placing future bets or redeemed as money. Modern gaming machines are typically computer-controlled with video display screens replacing the physically rotating reels of the old mechanical machines. Similarly, it has been a natural progression to provide simulations of the stand-alone style machines on the Internet. These types of computerised machines usually award winnings in the form of credits tallied on a credit meter. However, winnings may also be in the form of an actual or potential benefits to the player. For example, the machine can award a set number of free games where the reels spin without the player needing to place a bet. The machine could also allow an adjustment to the game that increases the probability of winning. For instance, the

player may be allowed a 'held reel' which can keep certain high value or desirable symbols in the array produced by the next spin of the unheld reels.

5 The video display of a rotating reel type computerised machine will usually present an array of symbols in five columns and three rows equating to the symbols that would normally be seen on five physically rotating reels of a mechanical machine.

Within the array are a number of 'paylines'. Paylines are lines of predetermined adjacent positions within the arrays. The symbols that appear in these positions are compared to the winning combinations. Any paylines carrying a bet and showing one of the winning combinations will pay winnings.

10 Today paylines will usually extend along each row and various angled or "zigzagged" lines through the array, whereas once, only the middle row was available in the old style mechanical machines. Most computerised gaming machines will offer at least five paylines in a five-reel array. Many machines offer more in order to enhance the gaming experience. Eventually, all the practical paylines in the five-column, three-row array were being made
15 available for players on most machines.

In an ongoing effort to maintain the player's interest, many machines now offer secondary or "feature" games. The feature appears upon some trigger event such as a predetermined outcome in the primary or base game. The feature can be used to provide the player with relatively large winnings and thereby provides a strong incentive to
20 continue playing the machine. However, a particularly generous feature will require the machine to pay less winnings during the base game or be configured so that the feature occurs relatively infrequently. In both situations, there is a risk that the player will lose interest and discontinue playing the machine.

To provide the player with a substantial incentive, it is possible to link several gaming
25 machines together and offer a relatively lucrative jackpot prize. However, as discussed above, the more generous the jackpot prize the less often it can be awarded. If the jackpot has not been awarded for some time, the player can tend to forget or lose focus on it as an incentive to continue playing.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to overcome or ameliorate at least one of the disadvantages of the prior art, or to provide a useful alternative.

5 According to a first aspect, the present invention provides a gaming machine adapted to:

display a base game of chance that pays winnings on the occurrence of a winning outcome; and.

display a feature game of chance that operates every time the base game operates; wherein,

10 a winning outcome in the feature game also pays winnings.

According to a second aspect, the present invention provides a gaming system including a display screen linked to player actuated controls via a processor, the system being adapted to:

15 display a base game of chance on the display screen, the base game of chance configured to pay winnings on the occurrence of a winning outcome; and

display a feature game of chance on the display screen, the feature game configured to operate everytime the base game operates; wherein,

a winning outcome in the feature game also pays winnings.

20 Preferably, the base game is of the spinning reel type. In a further preferred form, the featured game is also of the spinning reel type.

In a particularly preferred form, one or more pre-conditions must be met before the feature game operates with every operation of the base game. The pre-conditions may include one or more of the following:

- 25 ▪ continuous operation of the gaming machine for a certain period of time;
- placing bets on a certain number of the available paylines in the base game;
- placing bets of a threshold value; or
- completing a threshold number of the base games within a set period of time.

In another preferred form, the probability of a winning outcome in the feature game is increased once one or more of the pre-conditions are met.

In one preferred form, a winning outcome in the feature game awards the player a jackpot prize; wherein,

the jackpot prize is available to, and contributed to by, several linked gaming machines.

5 { Preferably, the feature game involves two or more randomly awarded jackpot prizes having different values. In a first embodiment, the feature game may involve separate games of chance to awarding each of the jackpot prizes. In a second embodiment, the feature game involves a single game of chance with different winning outcomes for respectively awarding each of the jackpot prizes.

10 { According to the first embodiment, the feature game involves a separate set of reels for each of the jackpot prizes, wherein the occurrence of a predetermined number of designated WIN symbols in each of the sets of reels will award the associated jackpot prize.

15 { Preferably, the number of reels associated with each jackpot prize value increases in accordance with the value of the jackpot prize, wherein the designated WIN symbol must appear on every reel in the set in order to win the associated jackpot prize.

According to the second embodiment, the feature game involves a set of reels which spin to produce a random selection of symbols wherein the occurrence of predetermined threshold numbers of designated WIN symbols will award the associated jackpot prize.

20 { In a particularly preferred form of both embodiments, a consolation prize is awarded if none of the jackpot prizes are won.

25 { According to another preferred embodiment, the spinning reels in the feature game can be stopped by a player-actuated control on the gaming machine. Preferably, the actuated control only stops some of the reels every time it is actuated such that the set of reels is stopped in a progressively staged manner. Again, if none of the jackpot prizes are won, a consolation prize is awarded.

* Using the present invention the risk that the player will become disinterested while waiting for the feature game to trigger is removed. [The feature game can trigger with every operation of the base game or by setting certain pre-conditions that the player can simply choose to meet in order to gain access to the feature game.] Using pre-conditions, such as
30 betting on all available paylines and/or betting the maximum number of allowable credits

per payline and/or playing the machine for a set period of time, will obviously increase the 'return' or profit that the machine will yield over time.

Furthermore, operating the feature game after every base game acts a regular reminder of the potential feature game winnings (such as a linked jackpot prize) and thereby maintain the feature as a strong incentive for the player to continue playing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Fig. 1 shows a schematic representation of the gaming machine screen operating in feature game mode; and

Fig. 2 shows the gaming machine screen in feature game mode in accordance with another embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1 shows a schematic representation of the display screen when the machine is operating in feature game mode. The machine switches to feature game mode after every operation of the base game (not shown) so that the player does not need to wait for a random trigger event to occur. The game designer may also set certain pre-conditions on the operation of the feature game after every base game, such as betting on all available paylines, betting the maximum amount of credits and/or playing the game for a set period of time. Again, the player does not need to wait for a random trigger to occur, but can simply initiate the feature game after every base game by satisfying the pre-conditions.

The feature game can be displayed on the screen at the same time as the base game, or the screen can switch to a dedicated feature game display to reinforce to the player that the machine is operating in feature mode.

The display shown in Fig. 1 includes a game title 1, game information area 2, and three different sets of reels 3, 4 and 5. Each set of reels determines whether the associated jackpot prize is won. The jackpot prizes may be available to, and contributed to by, a group

of linked gaming machines. Of course, the minor jackpot will be of less value than the major jackpot which in turn will be less than the maxi jackpot. Likewise, the probability of winning each of the jackpot prizes is determined accordingly.

5 In the embodiment shown in Fig. 1, each reel and can display only one of two different symbols – the "WIN" symbol and the "X" symbol. In order to win a jackpot prize every reel in a set of reels must show the "WIN" symbol. Fig. 1 shows that the player has won the major jackpot as every reel in the set 4 displays the "WIN" symbol. Reels in sets 3 and 5 include "X" symbols therefore the associated jackpot prizes are not awarded.

10 To avoid any negative player sentiment, the game designer may wish to award a small consolation prize in the event that none of the jackpot prizes are won. Furthermore, to promote player involvement and interest in the feature, the machine can be designed so that the player chooses when to stop the spinning reels by pressing a button on the control console (not shown). To draw out the player's involvement during the feature, the reels can be stopped in stages with each subsequent press of the button. Accordingly, player's can be
15 given the impression that they have some input into the outcome of the feature game.

The game designer can structure the features so that it allows the player to win one, two or all of the jackpot prizes. Alternatively, the feature can cease once any of the jackpot prizes are won.

20 Referring to Fig. 2, the display of a second embodiment of the feature game is shown. Again, the screen shows the game name 1 and status information 2. However, all three jackpot prizes are determined by spinning twelve separate reels 10.

The reels can display either the "WIN" symbol or the "X" symbol. The jackpots are awarded according to displayed criteria 6. It will be appreciated that this example of the feature game awards only one of the jackpots (if any). Otherwise, winning the major
25 jackpot prize would automatically entail winning the minor jackpot and similarly winning the maxi jackpot would entail winning both the major and minor jackpots. It is more convenient to simply adjust the values of the major and maxi jackpots to account for this and award the player one jackpot only. Also, the game designer may wish to provide a small consolation prize in the event that no jackpots are won.

As with the embodiment shown in Fig. 1, the twelve reels 10 can also be stopped by the player actuating a designated button on the control console. Furthermore, the reels 10 can be stopped in a staged manner by stopping the reels 7 in response to pressing the designated button once and stopping the reels 8 in response to pressing the button a second time and finally stopping the reels 9 when the button is pressed for the third time. Again, this will increase the level of player involvement as well as the sense of anticipation in waiting for the final outcome of the feature game to be known.

A gaming machine designed in accordance with the present invention gives the player an opportunity to play the feature game after every base game without waiting for a random trigger event. This is particularly useful when awarding a substantial jackpot prize such as a linked jackpot as the feature frequently reminds the player of the jackpot value even though it is won relatively infrequently. This helps to maintain the large jackpot value as a strong incentive to continue playing.

The present invention has been described herein by way of example only. Skilled workers in this field will readily recognise many variations and modifications which do not depart from the spirit and scope of the broad inventive concept.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. A gaming machine adapted to:
display a base game of chance that pays winnings on the occurrence of a winning outcome; and
5 display a feature game of chance that operates every time the base game operates; wherein,
a winning outcome in the feature game also pays winnings.
2. A gaming machine according to claim 1 wherein, the base game is of the spinning reel type.
- 10 3. A gaming machine according to claim 2 wherein, the featured game is also of the spinning reel type.
4. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3 wherein, one or more pre-conditions must be met before the feature game operates with every operation of the base game.
- 15 5. A gaming machine according to claim 4 wherein, the pre-conditions include one or more of the following:
 - continuous operation of the gaming machine for a certain period of time;
 - placing bets on a certain number of the available paylines in the base game;
 - placing bets of a threshold value; or
 - 20 ▪ completing a threshold number of the base games within a set period of time.
6. A gaming machine according to claim 5 wherein, the probability of a winning outcome in the feature game is increased once one or more of the pre-conditions are met.
7. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein, a winning outcome in the feature game awards the player a jackpot prize; wherein,
25 the jackpot prize is available to, and contributed to by, several linked gaming machines.
8. A gaming machine according to claim 7 wherein, the feature game involves two or more randomly awarded jackpot prizes having different values.

9. A gaming machine according to claim 8 wherein, the feature game involves separate games of chance, each awarding one of the jackpot prizes respectively.

10. A gaming machine according to claim 8 wherein, the feature game involves a single game of chance with different winning outcomes, each awarding one of the jackpot prizes respectively.

11. A gaming machine according to claim 9 wherein, the feature game involves a separate set of reels for each of the jackpot prizes, wherein the occurrence of a predetermined number of designated win symbols in each of the sets of reels will award the associated jackpot prize.

12. A gaming machine according to claim 11 wherein, the number of reels associated with each jackpot prize value increases in accordance with the value of the jackpot prize, wherein the designated win symbol must appear on every reel in the set in order to win the associated jackpot prize.

13. A gaming machine according to claim 10 wherein, the feature game involves a set of reels which spin to produce a random selection of symbols wherein the occurrence of predetermined threshold numbers of designated win symbols will award the associated jackpot prize.

14. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 8 to 13 wherein, a consolation prize is awarded if none of the jackpot prizes are won.

15. A gaming machine according to any one of claims 11 to 14 wherein, the spinning reels in the feature game can be stopped by a player-actuated control on the gaming machine.

16. A gaming machine according to claim 15 wherein, the actuated control only stops some of the reels every time it is actuated such that the set of reels is stopped in a progressively staged manner.

17. A gaming system including a display screen linked to player actuated controls via a processor, the system being adapted to:

display a base game of chance on the display screen, the base game of chance configured to pay winnings on the occurrence of a winning outcome; and

display a feature game of chance on the display screen, the feature game configured to operate everytime the base game operates; wherein,

a winning outcome in the feature game also pays winnings.

5 18. A gaming system according to claim 17 wherein, the base game is of the spinning reel type.

19. A gaming system according to claim 18 wherein, the featured game is also of the spinning reel type.

20. A gaming system according to claim 19 wherein, one or more pre-conditions must be met before the feature game operates with every operation of the base game.

10 21. A gaming system according to claim 20 wherein, the pre-conditions include one or more of the following:

- continuous operation of the gaming machine for a certain period of time;
- placing bets on a certain number of the available paylines in the base game;
- placing bets of a threshold value; or
- 15 ▪ completing a threshold number of the base games within a set period of time.

22. A gaming system according to claim 21 wherein, the probability of a winning outcome in the feature game is increased once one or more of the pre-conditions are met.

23. A gaming system according to any one of claims 17 to 22 wherein, a winning outcome in the feature game awards the player a jackpot prize; wherein,
20 the jackpot prize is available to, and contributed to by, several linked gaming machines.

24. A gaming system according to claim 23 wherein, the feature game involves two or more randomly awarded jackpot prizes having different values.

25 25. A gaming system according to claim 24 wherein, the feature game involves separate games of chance, each awarding one of the jackpot prizes respectively.

26. A gaming system according to claim 24 wherein, the feature game involves a single game of chance with different winning outcomes, each awarding one of the jackpot prizes respectively.

27. A gaming system according to claim 25 wherein, the feature game involves a separate set of reels for each of the jackpot prizes wherein, the occurrence of a predetermined number of designated win symbols in each of the sets of reels will award the associated jackpot prize.

5 28. A gaming system according to claim 27 wherein, the number of reels associated with each jackpot prize value increases in accordance with the value of the jackpot prize wherein, the designated win symbol must appear on every reel in the set in order to win the associated jackpot prize.

10 29. A gaming system according to claim 26 wherein, the feature game involves a set of reels which spin to produce a random selection of symbols wherein the occurrence of predetermined threshold numbers of designated win symbols will award the associated jackpot prize.

30. A gaming system according to any one of claims 24 to 29 wherein, a consolation prize is awarded if none of the jackpot prizes are won.

15 31. A gaming system according to any one of claims 27 to 30 wherein, the spinning reels in the feature game can be stopped by a player-actuated control on the gaming machine.

20 32. A gaming system according to claim 31 wherein, the actuated control only stops some of the reels every time it is actuated such that the set of reels is stopped in a progressively staged manner.

34. A gaming machine substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

35. A gaming system substantially as herein described with reference to any one of the embodiments of the invention illustrated in the accompanying drawings and/or examples.

25 DATED this 12th day of August 2003

BALDWIN SHELSTON WATERS

Attorneys for: AINSWORTH GAME TECHNOLOGY LIMITED

ABSTRACT

A gaming machine such as a spinning reel type gaming machine which operates a base game of chance as well as a feature game 3, 4 or 5, wherein, operation of the feature does not rely on the random occurrence of a trigger event. Instead, the feature game will
5 operate at the end of every operation of the base game, however, the feature game randomly awards winnings.

Figure 1 to accompany the abstract

JACKPOT GAME

CREDIT

BET

MESSAGES

WIN

\$1 BUYS
XXX CREDITS

5

Maxi Jackpot

X	X	WIN	WIN
---	---	-----	-----

4

Major Jackpot

WIN	WIN	WIN
-----	-----	-----

3

Minor Jackpot

WIN	X
-----	---

Fig. 1

JACKPOT GAME

CREDIT

BET

MESSAGES

WIN

\$1 BUYS
XXX CREDITS

Maxi Jackpot -> match any 8 or more WIN symbols

Major Jackpot -> match any 6 or 7 WIN symbols

Minor Jackpot -> match any 4 or 5 WIN symbols

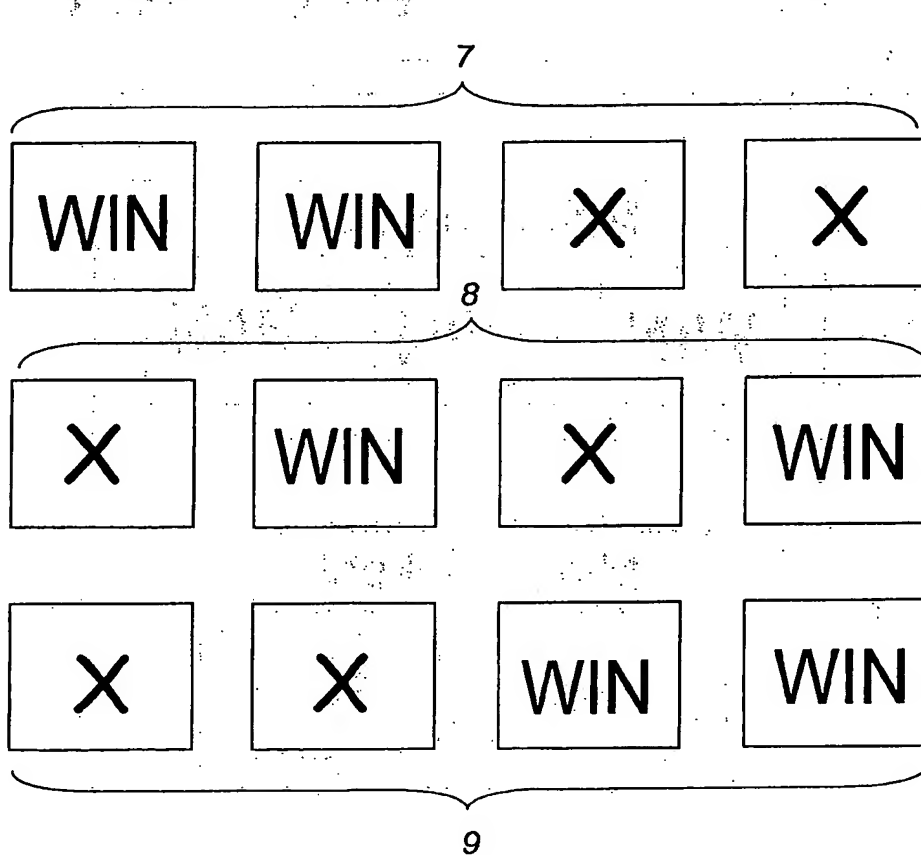


Fig. 2

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